

Mr. Chuck Hungerford, Chair  
and Planning Commissioners  
City of Sunnyvale  
PO Box 3707  
Sunnyvale CA 94088-3707

November 22, 2005

SUBJECT: Deny Appeal of Applicant, 929 Lois Ave., File #2005-0985  
Planning Commission Agenda of November 28, 2005

Dear Chairman Hungerford and Planning Commissioners:

We ask that the Planning Commission deny the appeal before you with regard to Design Review of a proposed project at 939 Lois Avenue. In addition to denying the specific issue being appealed by the applicant, we ask that you consider completely rejecting the applicant's inappropriate design or, at the very least, requiring that the proposed structure be moved to the east as far as setbacks allow.

We understand that the 929 Lois property would benefit from expansion, particularly in its complete lack of a garage. We don't wish to stand in the way of the applicant expanding her home or making it her dream home. However, the proposed design contains unacceptable negative impacts to both our home and the neighborhood within which it is located. Many homes in our neighborhood have been expanded over the years, including ours (before we purchased it). But those expansions were carried out in ways that minimized impacts on their immediate neighbors and used designs compatible with the neighborhood architecture. The proposal for 929 Lois does neither.

We own the home located immediately to the west of 929 Lois Avenue. We have lived there since 1996 and in Sunnyvale since 1987. Our concerns with the proposed design are twofold:

- The impacts of the design on sunlight and views for our neighboring living space.
- The fact that the style of the design is so completely inappropriate for its location that it violates the City's Single Family Home Design standards

#### **Impacts on Sunlight and Views**

Although the applicant has submitted this design as a single-story addition, the proposed roof height is essentially that of a two-story house. The roof peak is 22 feet high, located east of our home and parallel to our main living space and it is several feet closer to us than the existing roof peak. The design raises the roof peak by 4-5 feet and moves it 3-4 feet closer to us compared to the existing structure. Even with the modest height reduction required by the condition of approval, the four windows on our home's east side will be significantly shaded. Much of the square footage of the new structure is proposed for the side of the property that faces our house and is shown near the minimum four foot side yard setback.

Although Planning's definitions for corner lots define that side of 929 Lois a side yard, for purposes of this design it is used as a rear yard even though it will be only 4-5 feet from the property line. We learned of the existence of these plans two weeks after they were submitted. In subsequent conversations with the applicant she referred to this side yard as a "Dead Zone." It is anything but that on our side of the fence, as you can see from the attached photos of our garden. We found the applicant unwilling to consider any revision whatsoever to her design, saying that she has "fallen in love with" this exact design. She has stated her intent, if her appeal is rejected, to abandon these plans and return with an even higher, two-story design.

The Planning Division's condition of approval addresses the height issue in only a minor way and would lower the roof by only 1 1/2 foot. If the commission added another condition requiring that the footprint be shifted to the west (to the extent allowed) the roof peak would move away from us by 3-4 feet. While its height and steep pitch would still make the roof the dominant view from our eastern windows, a combination of these two changes would reduce somewhat the shading of our home and allow at least some view of the sky from our four east-facing windows.

#### **Architectural Design Inappropriate for Its Location**

One glance at the east elevation drawings for this project makes it clear that this design is completely out of character in this neighborhood, which extends from the east side of Mango Avenue to Bernardo Avenue on the west, and from Remington Drive (south) to Blair Avenue (north). The City planner characterizes these homes as "ranch" style. They have wood shake or composite shingle roofs with low pitches (typically 3 in 12) and roof heights around 17 to 18 feet. They are typically trimmed in wood around the windows and doors. Photos of four homes in the immediate vicinity of the project are attached. Note that all four homes have had additions made to them, yet remain in character with the neighborhood architecture.

The proposed design sits on a highly visible location on the corner of Knickerbocker Drive and Lois Avenue. The applicant describes it as a "French cottage" with a round turret entry and an extremely steep slate roof pitched at 9.5 in 12, rising to 22 feet at the peak. It is trimmed in stone and uses exposed rock as a decorative element.

There are no French cottages in our neighborhood or any homes remotely compatible with this design. We believe that one would be hard pressed to find another example of this design anywhere in Sunnyvale. This home style is simply inappropriate for its location.

#### **Single Family Home Design Techniques**

The view/shading problems imposed on our home by the proposed project and its startling architectural disconnection from its neighborhood both arise from the applicant's apparent ignorance of or disregard of the purposes, community expectations and design techniques detailed in the City's Single Family Home Design Techniques document. This document was adopted by the City Council on July 23, 2002. It states, in part:

**"1.2 Purpose:**

- Protect property owner livability and investments by discouraging inappropriate and out of scale adjacent homes.
- Maintain a sense of neighborhood by encouraging new development that is compatible in scale and character with existing housing
- Encourage thoughtful planning and design that respects the privacy of neighbors.

**"2.1 Neighborhoods Patterns**

"Specifically, the community expects to see new developments respect the scale of their neighbors along both sides of their block fronts, and avoid conditions where new development overwhelms nearby homes.

"Features that are often consistent within a neighborhood include the following:

- Roof types, orientation, slopes, eave heights, and overhangs
- Entry treatment and scale
- Exterior building materials
- Decorative elements"

The applicant does not appear to have referred to this document and absolutely did not conform her design to community expectations. Specific issues illustrating this include:

- Roof pitch of 9.5 in 12 (3 in 12 is typical in the neighborhood)
- Roof height of 22 feet (17-18 feet is typical in the neighborhood)
- Slate roof material (wood and composite shingles are typical in the neighborhood)
- Turret entry is completely alien to the neighborhood
- Use of exterior rock, also alien to the neighborhood
- Decorative elements of stone and travertine around windows and doors, also not seen in the neighborhood

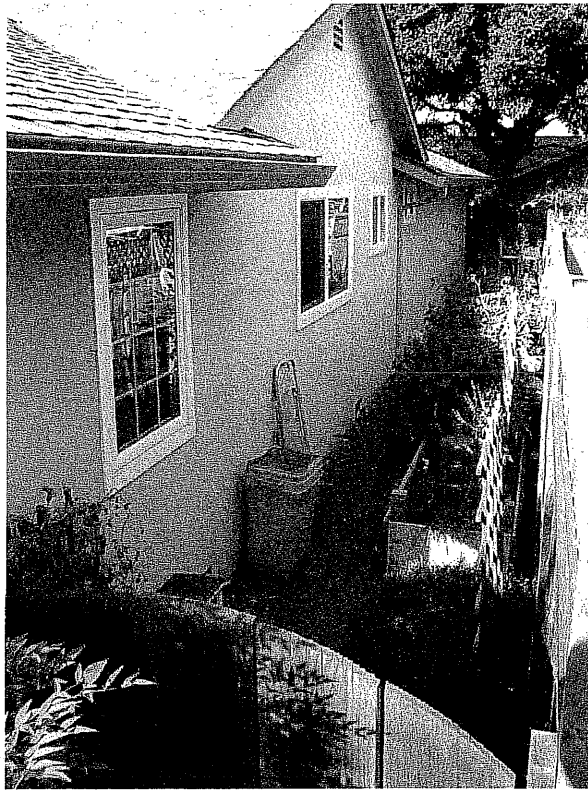
The proposed project imposes an architectural style that is jarringly at odds with its surroundings and unacceptably impacts access to light and a view of the eastern sky at our neighboring property. We ask that the Commission deny the specific issue being appealed by the applicant. Further, we ask that you consider completely rejecting the applicant's design or, at the very least, adding a condition requiring that the proposed structure be moved to the east as far as setbacks allow.

Very truly yours,



Mark Bowers  
Patty Bowers  
1055 W Knickerbocker Drive

Attachments (photos)



East side of our home, facing 929 Lois



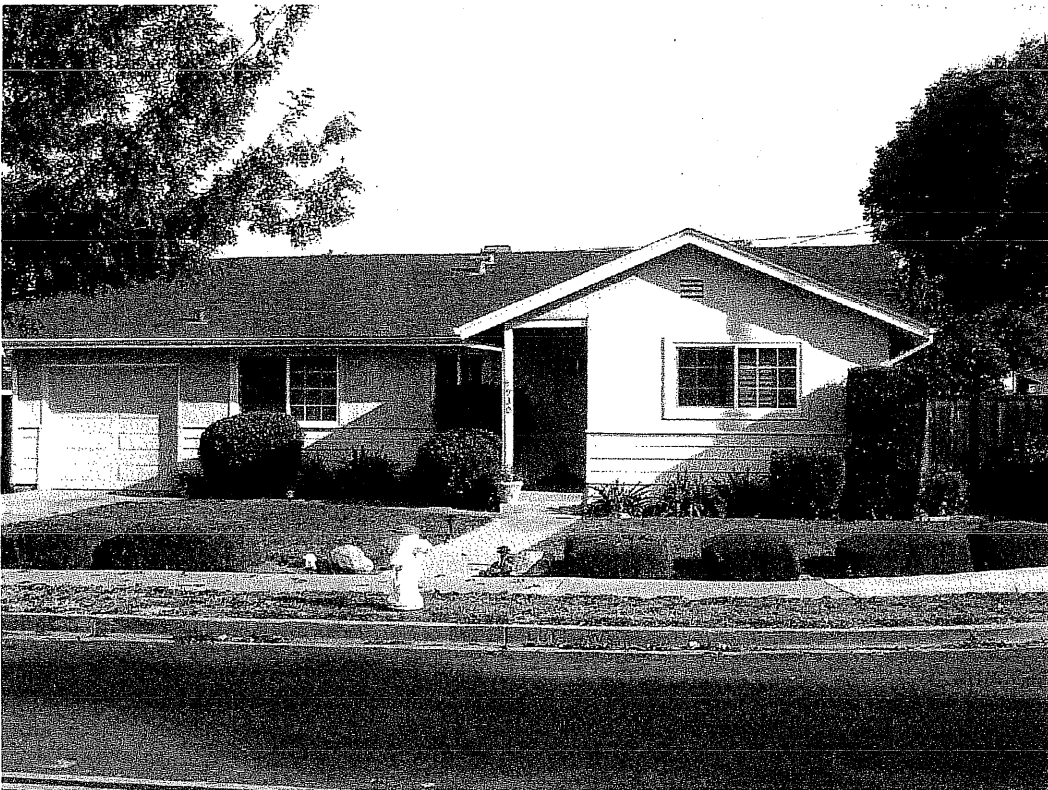
Raised bed organic garden



Our home (left) and 929 Lois (right), showing relationship of existing structures



Typical neighborhood architecture (home to west of 929 Lois)



Typical neighborhood architecture (home to east of 929 Lois)





Typical neighborhood architecture (home to north of 929 Lois)



Typical neighborhood architecture, further west on Knickerbocker Drive